
7 WAC Teaching Strategies: What Worked, What Didn't, and Why

What works, that's the main thing.

—Sociology, UC

In the previous chapter, we discussed the data on which we based our conclusions about the influences of WAC on teaching. That chapter dealt with the theories, habits of mind, confidence, enthusiasm, and new roles that WAC fostered. The same data sources (and the same problems with demonstrating WAC's "influence") inform this chapter about specific teaching strategies. But in addition to those faculty self-reports, syllabi, and other documents, here we also examine the survey data, particularly from UC and from Whitworth, which asked faculty what WAC strategies they were using.

Defining a WAC Strategy

To assess whether faculty have used WAC strategies or changed their strategies as a result of WAC, we must first define both "strategy" and "WAC." We define a teaching strategy as a deliberate action of the teacher, intended to result in student learning. Typical "WAC" strategies that were frequently named in the previous research and were used in the workshops on our three campuses include various kinds of informal writing ("journals," "prewriting," "informal writing," "ungraded writing"), explicit instructions and guidance for assignments, peer collaboration, teacher and peer feedback on drafts, and others.

Faculty in our study were frequently explicit, concrete, and confident about crediting specific strategies to WAC. Often, their definitions of a WAC strategy seemed consonant with what our records and memories indicated had been presented in the WAC program. For example, a UC criminal justice faculty member told us that the WAC workshop had led her to use informal writing in new ways to deal with racial tensions in her class.

However, some faculty had definitions of WAC strategies that were different from ours. A few confidently declared that they weren't using journals or peer collaboration; however, their classroom documents or their own statements later in the interview showed that they had, in fact, been using those strategies by *our* definition. Sometimes faculty were not sure whether something they were doing in the classroom would be classified as WAC. For example, a UC mathematician described how her department is instituting "laboratory sheets" in which students would be "asked to do various things and explain what they have done and what their conclusions are and why—not just give a numerical answer." Then she added, "I'm not sure if that's exactly what 'Writing Across the Curriculum' means." And later, she remarked, "All this is very different from students keeping journals and expressing themselves." She had not found "journals" useful in math classes, she explained, and counted herself as not having used them. So how should she be scored—as having used journals because we think so, or not using them because she thinks so?

Faculty, as we have said (page 63, this volume), talked about the usefulness of the "naming" that went on in WAC. However, faculty members' WAC terms were not always consistent. In the face of this confusion, then, we tried to listen to faculty, to hear what *they* thought WAC was, what impact they thought WAC activities had had on their classroom strategies, and how those strategies had grown and changed.

In the end, we believe, the more relevant question is not whether faculty have adopted WAC strategies as *we* would define them, but what happened, as a result of WAC, to *their* strategies—for no classroom is without strategies, and the introduction of WAC is not the dropping of pebbles into an empty jar, but an influence upon what are, and must remain, *the faculty members'* strategies, born in their own situations, incorporated into their own teaching philosophies, twisted by their constraints of time and resources, and wonderfully transformed by their enthusiasm and creativity.

*"In using prewriting,
I have students make
lots of lists to
stimulate discussion.
So I don't know if
that counts to you,
when you're talking
about writing."*

—Political Science, UC

And though they were willing, for our benefit, to try to trace the origins of their strategies, faculty seemed not to have lost any sleep over whether or not a strategy was WAC. Sometimes they honestly could not remember where a strategy or an idea had come from or trace WAC influences upon it. What stood out to faculty were strategies that either “worked” or did not.

Strategies That “Worked”; Strategies That Were Used

We believe that the notions of “adopting” and “resisting,” from the literature we reviewed in the introduction, need to be reexamined from the faculty members’ points of view. Faculty do not see themselves as resisters, but as sensible people trying to find what “works.”

Our data suggest that faculty will go to considerable lengths to use a teaching strategy they think is “working.” They will try to retain it even if their classes get larger, other constraints interfere, or the strategy entails more work. Thus the key issue, we think, is not whether a faculty member is using a particular strategy that researchers name or whether a faculty member is “resisting” WAC strategies, but how faculty members decide whether a strategy works, and hence, whether to use it or not.

Faculty Used Similar Criteria for Judging a WAC Strategy to Have Worked or Not Worked

An important finding of this study is that faculty used the same criteria for saying that a WAC strategy had “worked” as for saying that it had “not worked,” for adopting WAC strategies as for rejecting them. Faculty criteria focus on whether the WAC strategies did four things:

- *Community*: Did the strategy help build engagement and community in the classroom?
- *Learning*: Did the strategy lead to enhanced student learning?
- *Feasibility*: Was the strategy consonant with teachers’ time pressures and other constraints?
- *Fit*: Did the strategy fit teachers’ philosophies, priorities, and styles of teaching?

It was the application of these criteria, rather than “resistance” to WAC per se, that influenced faculty to use or not use WAC strategies.

Faculty with different teaching styles and personalities tried WAC strategies with different types of students, different class

structures, different disciplines—and all of these factors seemed to influence whether the WAC strategies “worked.” We even found that the same faculty member tried the same strategy in two different situations, discovering that it worked well in one situation but poorly in the other.

Faculty did not report themselves as particularly surprised by this variety. They saw themselves as constantly trying to find the proper *fit* between the situation and their own teaching strategies. They did not see themselves as converts or resisters to WAC, but as self-directed, rational human beings, trying to be better teachers in varied and complex circumstances, and using sensible criteria to determine whether a particular teaching strategy was working well in a particular situation.

Most Faculty Found Some WAC Strategies That Worked and Some That Did Not

In any single faculty member’s story, strategies adopted and strategies abandoned were often inextricably combined. And decisions about strategies were inextricably part of the teacher’s ongoing goals, theories, experiences, types of students, constraints of time and teaching load, and so on. Strategies are not successful or unsuccessful in a vacuum; nor is any strategy successful or unsuccessful for all teachers. Rather, a strategy is successful or not in a particular context and in the hands of a particular professor who uses it within the framework of his or her own goals, situations, reasons, and contexts. A WAC program, then, is not so much presenting a gospel as presenting a smorgasbord.

The following faculty stories illustrate how faculty evaluated whether a strategy “worked.” They illustrate the complexity of the world to which faculty must bring specific teaching strategies discussed or modeled in WAC.

The first four stories present strategies that clearly and resoundingly “worked” for the faculty member and were retained during a period of at least several years. (For other descriptions of strategies that worked, see pages 69, 84, 85, 105, 108, 111, 113, and 133, this volume.) The later stories present more complex mixtures of strategies that either worked or did not work.

Strategies That Worked, #1

—Richard Evans, Music, Whitworth

[Note: During his 1990 faculty workshop, Evans developed an assignment that he was still using when we interviewed him in 1994. Printed below are excerpts from his 1992 description in Hunt's booklet and from his 1994 interview. Figure 7.1 is his assignment sheet. Based on research findings that people who dislike a certain piece of music may come to like it after multiple listenings, the assignment asks students to listen to a piece of modern music six times, writing about it in different ways throughout the listenings. The assignment "works" for Evans because it results in student learning—specifically, students come to appreciate modern music in new ways. It leads to community as students get involved, express their appreciation, and give Evans the highest student evaluations ever. It also enhances Evans's role within his own professional community, as colleagues appreciate and use his assignment.]

[From the 1992 Hunt booklet:] "Introduction to Music Literature" is the first course in which music majors encounter writing about music. Such writing is expected to be much more intentional than writing about music in a nonmusic course. During the first year of teaching the course, Spring 1990, I assigned students the task of writing three to five pages about a composer, a composition, or a form/genre. The papers were interesting but rather routine.

I attended the first-year workshop in May 1990. As the workshop progressed, a piece of significant research in music learning theory began to merge with an idea for a writing assignment with much more learning significance. Students are sometimes reluctant to accept the music of our time. During the workshop I developed a plan for meeting this challenge. Research indicates that students tend to prefer those pieces they listen to at least six times. If this is so, I thought, maybe a writing assignment that included repeated listening would improve student attitudes toward modern music.

The new writing assignment asks students to select one of eight compositions from the twentieth century. Using a guide sheet I give them, they listen to the piece six times during the term. They research the piece, its composer, its style, its form, etc. After the first listening and the research, they submit a rough draft of the background researched material and their reaction to the first listening. That serves as the first two sections of the final paper. The third section of the final paper is the student's reaction after listening to the composition for the sixth time.

Let student comments from the final part of the assignment speak for its success:

Before, I had just said, "Write about this composer and this composition."

During the workshop, I developed a plan.

Students had to listen to a piece six times and write about it over time.

Assignment Sheet

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to provide an in-depth acquaintance with a significant musical composition of the twentieth century. This assignment will combine background knowledge with your reflections upon listening, to increase your understanding of twentieth-century music.

Procedures:

You are to listen six times to one of the compositions listed below. Numbers at the end of the title rate the difficulty of listening and comprehension. These works are on reserve in the music office.

[Compositions such as Bartok's *Miraculous Mandarin* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* are listed.]

After listening to the piece for the first time, you are to write the second third of the paper, answering the following question:

Thesis: This piece is (important) (not important) to me for the following reasons:

You should also answer the following questions:

1. What was the date of your first listening?
2. What was most striking in this piece?
3. Did you find anything in the piece you would like to listen to again? What was it?
4. Do you think you might learn to like this piece?
5. What in this piece sounds like something else you have heard? What is it?

After you have written the above, you are to research matters surrounding the composition of the piece. Your answers to these questions will serve as the first third of the paper, the *introduction*:

1. Find the Groves article about the composer and composition.
2. After reading the Groves article, select three entries from the bibliography at the end of the composer article, items which the Whitworth library holds.
3. Read the section in the articles or books pertaining to the composer's work on this particular composition.
4. Answer the following questions:
 - a. Why was it written?
 - b. From what part of the composer's creative life did this composition emerge?
 - c. Why is the piece important to the twentieth century?

Your answers to the above will serve as the first third of the paper, the introduction.

You are to turn in your first draft, the first two-thirds of the paper, no later than April 1.

Figure 7.1. Directions for the music assignment.

Figure 7.1 continued

Summary Activities:

Upon listening to the piece for the sixth time, you are to write the last third of your paper, answering the following question:

Thesis: Listening to a musical composition repeatedly affects one's view of a composition in the following ways:

Your answer should address these additional questions:

1. What was the date of your sixth listening?
2. How does your current view of the composition differ from your first reaction?
3. Of what are you aware in the piece that was not evident the first time you listened?

Summarize the importance of the piece to you.

List at the end of the text all sources used in writing the paper. Include a bibliography (sources used in writing) and a discography (a list of the recordings used).

In an appendix, list the dates of your second through fifth listenings. Tip: It is best to space the second through fifth listenings a week apart.

Student #1: I thought I would only respect this piece and never like it. Now I realize that I not only like this masterpiece, I am enamored [of] it. My ears have been converted to twentieth-century music. I should never listen to a composition and immediately make judgments. A lesson learned and wisdom gained through this assignment.

Student responses.

Student #2: If I ever got the chance, I would love to go and actually see the opera since I've seen it in my head so many times.

Student #3: Upon listening to [the piece] for the sixth time, I am convinced that listening to a musical composition repeatedly affects one's view of the music. From the first to the sixth listening, my recognition, appreciation, and understanding of the piece have changed considerably.

Student #4: After my first listening I concluded that I did not really like the work. . . . Now I can say that I have much respect for [the composer] and his masterpiece. . . . I truly enjoy the piece.

*Student
motivation
and learning.*

This is the most successful assignment in writing I have ever done. Students were motivated to a greater extent than in any other paper I have developed. There are still many small matters to refine in the assignment, but students were motivated to write, and they became very aware of the process of gaining appreciation and understanding of a new work.

Individual conferences will be held the next time the assignment is offered, Spring 1992.

[This professor wrote the above words in 1992. When we interviewed him in 1994, he was still using the assignment in essentially its original form. He had not yet held conferences; he was still writing his comments on the first draft. However, he again expressed his desire to hold conferences. Moreover, he gave us a fuller reflection on why this assignment had worked so well for him and his students: it had served as what he called a "carrying vehicle." Here are his words from the 1994 interview:]

*Learning: The
assignment
served as a
carrying
vehicle to
lead the
student to a
higher level of
understanding.*

You know, in music, the old cliché is you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. We have to make 'em drink. And I think all of teaching is that way. This assignment is what you might call a carrying vehicle. It's a construct or a convention, a way that you develop in which students can be led to a higher level of understanding and knowledge. The first time you face it, people can resist it because it could look like busy work. Or they wonder why they have to do it. They have to have confidence in me that what they're going to arrive at is better. And all throughout music teaching I've had this. The old cliché is that you pass out a new piece of music to a band, and they don't like it at first, but it will be their favorite piece at the concert, once they have penetrated into the deeper meaning of the piece. And that's what I've done with this assignment. I have the students go beyond the veneer and penetrate into its greater depths, and they have greater knowledge of how it's organized and things like that. And it makes the class more academic, more serious. It's absolutely a beautiful assignment. I took it to a music meeting of the Christian College Coalition. I had thirty copies, and they were all gone in half a day. And I've gotten feedback from [names a colleague] at [names a college] in Iowa. She's adapted it a bit, but she still uses the basic idea. So I'm very pleased. . . . The other thing is, I just got the best set of evaluations I've ever gotten.

*It makes the
class more
academic,
more serious.*

*Community:
feedback from
colleagues.*

*Good student
evaluations.*

Strategies That Worked, #2

—Douglas Ross, International Business, TSU

[Note: In his 1994 interview, Ross, who had been involved in WAC since the 1980s, recounted strategies he had “tried in class and either kept or abandoned.” This was one he had kept. In it, he divides the class into teams for business problem solving. Notice that this assignment involves no actual student writing, but the faculty member describes it as part of his growth through WAC and other experiences. It works for him because it enhances student learning, involvement, and community.]

A group exercise I’ve found fun to do and very, very rewarding is an exercise on crisis management. What I’ve done is to find several real situations that happened to companies. For example, a Baltimore manufacturer of peach preserves found that a piece of glass had gotten into one of its preserve bottles and cut a baby’s lip. So what can you do with a situation like that?

Well, I form the class into teams, and these teams take the role of senior managers of a particular company. I give several different circumstances—not just peach preserves, but chemical spills, etc. Each of the teams has a different circumstance. I hand out the facts in several lines to this management team. Then I ask a series of questions: What do you need to know, where are you going to find the information, and what are you going to do about it? I give them ten minutes to discuss this.

Then I’ll say, “OK, there has been a new break in circumstances.” So, I collect the first piece of paper and hand out the second, escalated set of circumstances. Instead of just the baby’s lip being cut, now pieces of wood and everything else are turning up in their products, from Baltimore to Maine, that sort of thing. Again, the same three questions: What information do you need, where are you going to get it, and what are you going to do about it? And then more time, more discussion. All this is internal to each group.

Then I walk around and say, OK, another escalation, and they all go, “Aaaah!” Welcome to the world.

In the debriefing time at the end, I ask them to set out answers to the three questions in relation to each group’s circumstances. From those, we derive a series of principles for dealing with crisis in a company.

Now, an alternative course for me would be to stand up and say, “This is what you should do: look at the possible damage to the bottom line, guess what aspects of the

Why it worked: I’ve found this exercise fun and rewarding.

I formed the class into teams taking the role of senior managers.

I give them a crisis situation.

At the end, I ask them to derive principles for dealing with crisis in a company.

I could stand up and say, “This is what you should do.” But, instead, I let them experience real circumstances.

organization are going to be affected," etc. But, instead, I let them experience very real circumstances from the perspective of a management team trying to deal with the circumstances and from there let them derive principles that they themselves think are going to be useful. That turns out to be a very potent exercise. They all remember it.

Strategies That Worked, #3

—Joseph Scanio, Physics, UC

[Note: Three years after his 1990 WAC workshop, Scanio contributed an article to the WAC Newsletter at UC, describing his use of informal writing in large physics classes. The first section below is that article. The second section contains his reflections in 1995, when, as an associate dean, teaching a much reduced load, he reflected back on the strategy he had described. The assignment has worked for him because it is feasible even in a large class and, most of all, because it results in a kind of student learning he values very much.]

I did not see how I could incorporate writing into my standard physics course.

At the workshop, it seemed like every ten minutes we were asked to write. The cumulative effect was quite remarkable.

I required five one-to-two-page writings during the quarter.

[From a 1993 UC WAC Newsletter:] It all began in the spring of 1990 at a one-hour, brown-bag WAC lunch meeting on campus. I did not see how I could possibly incorporate writing into my standard physics course, and I went to the meeting prepared to argue against writing in the sciences. There was nothing there for me, except for one concept which I had never considered before, that of informal writing: have the students write, not to be corrected and graded, but to enable the students to focus their ideas. I spent a fair amount of time mulling over how I might implement such an idea in my courses. Before I had time to formulate a new writing component to my courses, I attended a Shakertown WAC workshop later in 1990. There, it seemed that every ten minutes we were asked to write for ten or fifteen minutes on some subject. The cumulative effect of such writing was quite remarkable, and I was struck by how effective this was in organizing and expressing one's thoughts. I came home from Shakertown ready to try using informal writing.

I immediately implemented a writing component in the ninety-student introductory physics course in the spring and continued it during the following year in a special topics honors course in early universe cosmology. I required five one-to-two-page writings at two-week intervals during the quarter. The students were to write about anything "relevant" to the material being studied.

The papers had to be legible, and students were told they could be completed in under fifteen minutes. I did not grade the papers or correct grammar, spelling, or style. Course grades were completely determined by the “objective” components of the course: the problem sets, the tests, and the final exam. However, students who did not turn in all five writing assignments would receive an “I” grade. This would be changed to the earned letter grade if the student subsequently turned in the missing writings.

What, then, is the point? Having students hand in pages with words on them so that I can put five check marks by their names is hardly an exciting exercise. *It was absolutely crucial that I read the papers, make notes about them, and react to these papers in a directed way during the next class meeting.* The students would then be aware that I had actually read their specific papers, and if they included something of particular interest in their writings, I would comment about it. *The papers became progressively better through the quarter as students realized that I had actually taken time to read their writings.* While some students would give me matter-of-fact chapter summaries (which I believe were useful), most of them tried to produce an interesting anecdote. In fact, a student decided once to comment on the relevance and interest of each figure in a particular textbook chapter: this made me look at the figures in a totally new light!

The thousands of writing assignments I have read have convinced me that the students have been able to incorporate physics into their everyday thinking much more than they would have by merely doing the “objective” parts of the course. I have read many anecdotes with comments about how the student never realized before that there were physical laws governing the skidding of a car, an electrical shock, the rainbow he or she saw on the way to class, etc.

This writing component to my physics courses clearly requires time to read the papers and comment. However, since I am not grading or correcting them, I can read ninety papers in one to two hours. When I am using writing in two courses, I stagger the assignments. In addition, my reaction to the papers takes up class time, and I certainly cover less material now than I did before. This does not bother me in the least, since the class discussions we have while I am reacting to the writings are usually extremely useful in cementing concepts we have been discussing.

I did not grade the papers or correct grammar.

It was absolutely crucial that I read the papers and react to them at the next class meeting.

The papers became progressively better as the students realized I had read their writings.

Students have been able to incorporate physics into their everyday thinking.

Feasibility: I can read ninety papers in one to two hours.

I certainly cover less material now. That does not bother me in the least since class discussions now are extremely useful in cementing concepts.

The writing is another way for students to interact with physics.

A creative thought process has occurred.

Has student performance improved as a result of this writing component to the courses? I do not know. The averages on the exams have not changed. Nevertheless, the writing is another way in which the students can interact with physics, and, in that sense, I believe it is beneficial. I have read many writings that begin with a statement about not understanding a certain concept, and then, as the writing proceeds, the student begins to realize what is happening, and, by the end, he or she rephrases the concept in a way that indicates that a creative thought process has occurred.

The Future: I intend to continue this informal writing in any elementary course I teach. I am convinced that the students do learn from the exercise, as long as they hand in the writings on time. Occasionally, a student will come to the final exam with all five writing assignments and tell me how painful it is to do all five at once.

What else can be done? I would like to find a way to introduce writing in our large (550-student) calculus-based introductory course. The standard complaint from students is that they cannot do the problems. If they were asked to write down what it is about the problem that they cannot do, then they might be able to focus their thoughts and actually go a long way toward solving the problem on their own. If and when I teach this course again, I shall contemplate how to digest 550 daily or weekly thoughts on why students have trouble with physics problems.

[The following are his reflections in 1995. He has become associate dean of Arts and Sciences:]

I intend to continue this informal writing.

Yes, I still use basically the same technique. It's still fun; it still works. I don't teach calculus now, so I haven't integrated the journal there as I said I would. But I use it in an honors course on the first five seconds of the universe. There, the journals are different. Not so much describing car crashes, but more "I didn't understand Chapter 2." That's because the topic of the course is more divorced from real life.

Strategies That Worked, #4

—Carl Huether, Biology, UC

[Note: In this 1996 interview, seven years after his first WAC workshop, Huether describes an assignment in a large biology class where students, on e-mail, respond to articles about biological topics. His ways of making large classes interactive are featured in a thirty-minute faculty-development video, Making Large Classes Interactive, produced in 1996 at the University of Cincinnati. The video has won two national awards. (See works cited list.)]

Five years ago, I began teaching a large biology class for nonscience majors. The challenge was how to get the 400 students involved in the learning process. So I tried extra credit projects. One of them is the electronic journal on the network. The students buy, in the bookstore, a packet which contains instructions and the six scientific articles to which they must respond. Students are assigned to their own personal accounts on the e-mail. Students are arranged in groups of ten to fifteen. Then they read the articles and respond to four of the six. Those responses are circulated to the ten or fifteen other students in their group. The other students are required, in turn, to give six additional responses to the additional responses. So each student winds up giving four initial responses and six secondary responses for a total of ten. The teaching assistants (five are assigned to the course) evaluate the responses and assign credit.

The students clearly learn a lot about science. But, also, it's a wonderful opportunity for students to get to know the e-mail system. They can now communicate with anyone in the world. We have about 30–40 percent of the students participating in this extra-credit project.

In science, we are trained in research and scholarship but not trained in how to become educators. So when we get here, it takes a long time to learn. I got my initial view of students as clients or customers in my position as director of the program in genetic counseling. We spend a lot of time worrying about our clients. As I thought about my own educational position here, I thought, "Why shouldn't we see students in the same way?"

Complex Stories: Strategies That Worked, Strategies That Didn't, and Why

The next section contains some longer, more complex stories, so that readers can see how the strategies that worked and those that didn't work are typically intermingled in a faculty member's experience.

“What Works, That’s the Main Thing”

—Sociology, UC

[Note: This faculty member teaches sociology in three different settings: the College of Evening and Continuing Studies and the Institute for Learning in Retirement, both at UC, and also a graduate-level theological seminary.

The interview, in 1994, three years after his WAC workshop at UC, shows how enormously different his three teaching situations appear to him and how he varies his teaching strategies to accommodate them. He is aware of the enormously diverse factors that affect his classrooms—economic constraints (students at UC must retain a certain grade-point average for their employers to keep paying their tuition), physical constraints of class size (forty at UC, eight to fifteen at the seminary), and students’ language backgrounds.

His story also reveals some of the criteria he uses to make decisions about what is working. Getting students involved in the community of the classroom is highly important to him, and he struggles hard to achieve it. In his view, informal writing works because it has provided a significant new way to create that community he desires. But even his best strategy for getting students involved—in-class writing—does not work in all of his teaching situations.

He gives a mixed report on peer collaboration. On the one hand, what he calls “peer editing” is one of his first and most vivid memories about the Shakertown workshop, and he thinks it’s “a good model.” On the other hand, he says he doesn’t use it. Then he describes how he does use it, but only for formal papers. Formal papers, it seems to him, are not really WAC—an example of the difficulty with defining WAC which we discussed earlier in this chapter.

The interview took place in 1994, four years after the faculty member had attended a two-day WAC workshop. The interviewer is Virginia Slachman, then a graduate assistant at UC.]

Peer editing at the workshop was a good model, but I don’t use it.

Interviewer: What do you remember about the workshop?

Faculty: The peer editing. We would read things to another person and get feedback and then go back and rewrite. And then I think sometimes we would read the edited version to the total group and then have open discussion in the whole group.

Interviewer: Did that seem like a good model?

Faculty: Yes, that was a good model.

Interviewer: Was that something you used after that?

Faculty: Uh, no, not the peer editing.

Interviewer: What impacted the way you taught after the workshop?

Faculty: What I got out of it is, forget about grammar and structure and all the formal, intimidating aspects of writing and just write, using simple language, and also write under pressure at times. In my classes, I say, "OK, folks, write for three minutes. I prefer that you use full sentences, but if you want to use clauses, that's OK. You don't have to worry about paragraph structure. I won't keep these; I'll give them back to you."

I ask open-ended statements: just, "What does this say?" "What problems do you see here?" "What does this mean?" "How do you feel about this?" "What do you think about this?"

At the university, oh, let's say I had forty students in a class. At the seminary, I have small groups, eight to fifteen. But the methodology would be the same. Except, at the university, I *collected* the papers, without names on them. I shuffled them and then handed them out, and then we read them and we discussed. Naturally, at the university, we didn't have time to discuss all the papers. At the seminary, we did.

It was a little bit frustrating because we dragged that part of the class on too long. But they didn't have confidence in what they were saying; they edited as they went along. And I wanted them to have their first thoughts.

I would say that the chief contribution of WAC is, when you face a group and you put a question to them or you make some kind of a leading provocative statement, two or three people will respond. The large block of people will be passive. And I'm accustomed to looking at them with almost tears in my eyes: please participate, please participate—save me and save the class. This way [with the writing], everybody's thinking about it. They're engaged. Like it or not, you got 'em hooked.

Oh, by the way, I've also taught at the Institute for Learning in Retirement. That would be more creative. For example, I gave them a definition of a concept called "metanarrative." Metanarrative is a brief statement about yourself, who you are. I gave that as homework. They brought it back the following week. A couple of them were so good I had them reprinted in the informational bulletin of the Institute for Learning.

Another is, at the Institute for Learning, I teach a course on the Hebrew prophets. So we were reading Isaiah and Jeremiah and all these people, and I gave them a modern

What I got out of it: just write.

How I use in-class writing.

Adapting in-class writing to different settings.

Frustrations of in-class writing: the time it takes, students' lack of confidence.

Why in-class writing works: engagement and community.

there'd be frustrating tensions between the black and white students. So I went to RAPP, the Racial Awareness Pilot Project on campus. One of the things that they gave me was three questions: (1) When were you first aware of racism? (2) What messages did you get when you were growing up about different races? And (3) how do those messages affect you today? RAPP developed the three questions, but I didn't see them as a useful writing assignment until I went to Shakertown. I had done them just as a discussion. After Shakertown, I saw them as a springboard to get students to write.

Using writing to address racial tension.

The payoff: student learning.

Reading the papers was incredible.

Community: the quiet people will talk.

Move from open-ended to more structured assignments. Writing works because it is manageable in the available time. Result: more students are reading.

So I gave students a take-home writing assignment to answer the three questions. And I did grade these. Some of the students didn't take it seriously at all and would write a few sentences on each one. But most of the students really put a lot of thought into it. Reading through them was incredible. I would look for patterns and make a lot of comments on them and talk about them the next week. For example, I would say, "Look how many of you wrote that your parents were not racist as far as going to a school that was integrated, but a lot of you said if you went to a dance with somebody of a different race, especially if you were white, then all of a sudden it was different." Then we can look at these scales of racism. So going to Shakertown really helped me to develop those kinds of things. One of the things I learned at Shakertown was that if you have people do a writing assignment before they do a discussion, then the quiet people will be more likely to talk.

Interviewer: Did you find that to be true?

Faculty: Yes, definitely. They had something there to look at, and they had thought it through, and they didn't feel the lack of confidence and shyness. It also gave them the feeling it was OK to talk about their own racism or to question things. It brought up some heated arguments in the class, and I used to hate those, and I'm still not comfortable with them, but I think they're useful learning exercises for everybody. And I just tell everybody, "As long as everybody is respectful when they're asking and answering questions, then that's why we're here."

Another thing I changed after the Shakertown workshop: rather than saying, "Just tell me what you're thinking about what you're learning in this class," I give them a particular question that is related to the readings and to what I've lectured about. So it's sort of like I'm giving an

essay question. But on the exam, if I have them do essay questions with eighty students, I'd never get them graded. But this way, I just have one question that I do for a little over half the class sessions of the quarter. I allow them to drop their lowest grade, but if they miss a class, then they can't make it up. I still haven't quite worked it all out, but it seems to be working all right. One thing I found [was] that many more of them started doing the reading than before.

And the other thing was, just in the last couple of years, I've noticed that they have really liked the idea that I thought of them as critical thinkers, which I did not communicate to them before.

Interviewer: How did you discover that?

Faculty: They always liked that I wrote a lot of comments on their reaction papers. But there were some students in there who never spoke, who did OK on multiple-choice exams, but wrote these incredible critiques of the readings. I didn't always agree with them, but they were very good.

I always told them, "I don't agree with you, but it's very well written and it's an 'A+' paper." Typically, the first couple of times I do that in the class, I make a copy of some of the best ones and hand them out to the whole class and say, "This is what I'm looking for." I started showing them that I valued the [notion] that they could critique something and that they could be critical thinkers. And when I saw that they liked that—and, again, not for every student, but for a significant portion of them—then I started at the beginning of the quarter by saying, "I want you to be critical thinkers. You don't just come to college to input, input, input. You need to be processing what you're inputting, because I know as well as you do that you're not hearing the same thing in all of your classes. You may hear in my class that we have a very unjust criminal justice system, and I know you're hearing in your other classes that things are very fair. And you have to think about what you're reading and what you're learning. Because, obviously, you're getting a lot of different messages. And you don't need to think of this just in terms of who's right, but what do you think? How does this make sense? What are some of the potential flaws in it?" And they really responded to that.

And what's been interesting, and I guess surprising to me, is that the undergraduates seem to respond much better than the graduate students.

Students really liked the idea that I treated them as critical thinkers.

And when I saw they liked that, I started at the beginning of the quarter by saying, "I want you to be critical thinkers." They really responded to that.

Interviewer: Why?

*Freewrites
have not
worked well in
graduate
classes.
Students were
resistant.*

Faculty: I don't know. A lot of times, when I try to do freewrites or things like that, even though the next year they might tell me, "Oh, I decided I did like that," at the time they were real resistant to it. They felt it was just busy work, that I was just doing that instead of giving lectures. They wanted . . . real in-depth discussions in class, and yet I've had a real hard time getting those discussions going. One of the problems is that grad classes are two hours. If I had to pick my greatest frustration and the things I'm worst at with WAC, it would be using it in a graduate class.

*One grad class
worked well.
They had
two-page
papers due.*

Last year, I did [teach] a really wonderful grad class that was an elective, . . . the best one I've taught since I've been here. Interestingly, it only had one criminal justice major in it. It was a very hard class. They had to read a whole lot, and they had a two-page paper due every week. I sometimes had them do informal writings in there, which [they] seemed to like. But the weekly two-page paper had to be scholarly. They could not use the word "I." They were not to use personal experiences anymore. I started with twenty students, and ten of them dropped it after the first week when they saw it was a lot of reading and a lot of writing. At first I was—I'm still—irritated by that. I was disappointed because I thought, "Oh this is too bad, that grad students are that lazy." And I tried to just say, "Well, maybe they had a statistics course this quarter, and they felt they just couldn't put that much time into it." But it was a good class, and those students got a lot of my feedback. Every week I graded the two-page papers very specifically, very rigorously, I carefully graded them within twenty-four hours, I had everybody's home address, and I mailed them to them right away so that they would have [their paper] before they had to write the next one. Then, in addition, for about the first half of the quarter, I would type up summaries of common mistakes or things to think about. For example, I talked about using the word "Americans" to mean people from the U.S. So let's think about that, and I've had to train myself. It wasn't always grammatical or stylistical, although most of them tended to be. So, in that class, that seemed to work pretty well. It finally got to the point where they seemed to know pretty much what I wanted. They got very good at integrating the reading with their writing. After a while, I still mailed them the feedback, but I did not have to do the summaries.

*They liked the
informal
writing.*

*But it was a
good class,
and students
got a lot of my
feedback.*

*Responding to
students'
writing.*

*So in that
class it seemed
to work pretty
well.*

*Result: better
student work.*

When I got my end-of-quarter student evaluations, about three of the ten wrote that they were rather put out that I had not allowed them to use personal pronouns or personal experiences in the two-page papers. And one or two of them said they felt that that meant they couldn't critique it. So one of the things I realized . . . was that the next time I teach using that method, I'm going to have to communicate to [students] that just because you're summarizing the readings and I don't like you to use the word "I" or your personal experience, that doesn't mean you can't critique what you're reading. And you can use your personal experiences during class. What I'm trying to do is to get them to see that when you write for professional journals, you're not going to be using your personal experience.

Interviewer: You said, in general, that your grad classes don't work.

Faculty: Right. Sometimes I think it's the quality of the grad students. There were a lot of them who weren't doing the writings. Many of them would, in fact, be quite hostile on the teaching evaluations. They saw this as babysitting them and checking that they had done the readings. Well, that was partly true, and I'm not going to apologize for that, either, because my experience has been that a lot of them *don't* do the readings. What happens is, I'll discuss the readings during lecture or we'll have a class discussion, and a lot of them will just bank on the fact that they're going to find out what was in the readings so they don't have to do them, and they'll know what I think is important in order to answer the exam.

Interviewer: It seems there were some specific things suggested at Shakertown which you implemented, and some of those which you had to continue to refine.

Faculty: Right, and I'm still refining them, that's very true. One of the things that I was already doing, which, until Shakertown, I didn't realize anybody else did except for me, was allowing them to hand papers in early and grading them and then giving them back. That's a really great idea, because otherwise you spend all this time writing comments and correcting somebody's paper. And, of course, the worst papers are the ones you spend the most time on, and those tend to be the students that don't come and pick the papers up anyway. And I hate editing other people's work; I absolutely just loathe it. I don't even like

Next time I have to communicate to them.

Grad students saw this as babysitting.

I'm still refining.

Draft response works because your communication to students is used.

Some of them will take the feedback seriously.

doing my own, but I really hate doing other people's. So, to me, that was incredibly frustrating. But with the research methods class, which I taught both undergrad and grad, I make them design a research model. They have to come up with what would be your hypothesis, and given this hypothesis what are your dependent and independent variables, what's your sample going to be. Some people have a very hard time formulating that. If I let them hand in an idea to me, and I give them some feedback, some of them will really take that feedback very seriously and turn a "D" paper into an "A" paper, not just changing with my feedback, but taking it extra steps beyond that.

Interviewer: Have you used peer collaboration?

I haven't used peer collaboration.

Faculty: I really haven't. The only thing, I had lunch with Barbara Walvoord and somebody from the sociology department—I've forgotten his name; somebody I hadn't met before—and peer collaboration was supposed to be what we talked about, and that was kind of helpful. I can't remember exactly what I got out of it, but I can remember thinking when I left the lunch that it had been helpful.

Interviewer: What stands out most to you about Shakertown?

It was okay if the ideas didn't work.

Faculty: The validation of the importance of teaching and trying different methods to teach something and that it was OK if they didn't work.

"There Were a Lot of Good Ideas I Didn't Use"

—John Yoder, Political Science and History, Whitworth

[Note: The interviewer is Linda Hunt. The interview was conducted in 1994, five years after Yoder's first WAC workshop. It illustrates how a faculty member uses WAC to build what he believes are his own personal strengths, deliberately ignoring other aspects. The story also contains a marvelous account of the difficulties of using journals in a multicultural learning environment. Figure 7.2 is a copy of Yoder's assignment sheet for the research paper.]

I realized my work wasn't as productive as it could have been.

Interviewer: What happened in the workshop?

Faculty: Well, I think I came away recognizing that I'd always put in a lot of work teaching writing, and much of that work wasn't as productive as it could have been, and maybe it was misdirected. And I also learned there are ways of teaching students the skills that go into writing.

Prior to the workshop, what I had done was take a paper and virtually rewrite it for the student, which is maybe not such a bad idea, although I think I was a bit heavy-handed, and the process was excessively time-consuming. But I didn't have any accountability afterwards. I just handed the corrected papers back to the students and expected that would do some good. And, once in a while, I'd come back in the fall and see the papers still in the box, and even I had to admit that if the students didn't bother to pick up the papers, my method probably wasn't doing a lot of good.

Interviewer: What kinds of changes did you initiate after the workshop?

Faculty: Well, there were a lot of good ideas that I didn't use. As Barbara [Walvoord] kept saying, "You can only use so many things." And my goal is to teach students how to do a good research project. That's probably what I myself do best. And I think that's critical for graduate school or for their professional work. And so I put together a package: steps to produce a research project. And in some ways it was modeled on one of Barbara's presentations. She described a professor who had devised a scheme to help students do research. I used that a bit, but I basically thought back, "How do I put together a research project?" And I broke that process down into steps. This method teaches not just how to write but how to approach a project, how to develop a question, how to become familiar with the basic literature, how to organize, and how to collect data. I put all those items together in steps, culminating in a rough draft that I read and turn back to the students, and then a final draft incorporating my comments. So I think this process broke everything down into steps and provided accountability.

Interviewer: And did you conference that first draft? I thought you described to me once that you had conferences.

Faculty: Yes, I did, and I still do sometimes, but not as frequently. I'm always torn among the multiple goals I have for each class, and I've got a lot of material in courses. To do conferencing means basically I must give up one week of classes. So now I don't drop class. Students schedule meetings with me and come in. Probably half the students come in.

Some students complain about my detailed formula for writing papers. And I'm sure it may hurt my teacher

There were a lot of good ideas that I didn't use.

Guiding the research paper.

Draft responses.

Problem: logistics and coverage.

Guide for the Research Project

Preparing a successful research paper is a complex but not impossible task. While cramming for an exam may be somewhat like running the 100-meter dash, writing a research paper is more like completing a marathon. Students who pace themselves and who plan their efforts carefully will do far better than students who expend brilliant but short bursts of energy. In writing a paper, as in running a long-distance race, the secret is preparation and persistence.

During the course of the semester, you will complete all of the steps essential for writing a journal-length article. Because the steps are cumulative, it is necessary to take them in sequence, and it is critical that you proceed in a timely manner. Therefore, each of the following assignments is due at the start of the class period designated in the syllabus. Projects turned in after the start of that class period will receive reduced credit. And, because all projects are sequential, I will not accept any subsequent project until you have completed the previous assignment.

Except where specifically indicated, all assignments must be typed, and they must be kept together in a labeled file folder or note-card packet.

Step One: Background Reading

In preparation for choosing your research topic, scan a number of journals and read several general essays about an area of interest to you. Tables of contents and articles in journals or introductory chapters in current books provide a quick overview and help identify the most basic issues and arguments of concern for scholars. These materials will also refer to the most essential sources and the most important scholars working on the topics you may wish to research.

For your folder, submit one or two pages listing titles, authors' names, and the dates of the sources you read. Also list the major points covered in the essays, any problems, arguments, or debates you encountered (these are often good research topics), and a short list of key sources noted in the essays. (10 points, due February 19.)

Step Two: A Key Question

Research papers attempt to answer an important question; they do not just summarize information. Once the question has been formulated clearly and precisely, the rest of your task is to gather data and develop logical arguments which will answer the question. In a completed research paper, the answer to this question is the thesis statement.

For your folder, submit a research question of no more than one paragraph. (5 points, due February 28.)

Step Three: Web of Ideas

In preparation for your library work, you need to identify the key issues which relate to your question. These issues or topics can be linked together in a weblike structure that is a primitive outline. The advantages of a web are that the web may be expanded or modified easily and that the web provides a visual representation of the logic of your argument. [Inserts boxed item

Figure 7.2. History course guide for the research project.

Figure 7.2 continued

illustrating web.]

For your folder, submit a one-page handwritten web of ideas. (10 points, due March 7.)

Step Four: Annotated Bibliography

Good research is based on a careful survey of existing primary and secondary data. Secondary works contain the observations, judgments, and conclusions of other scholars, while primary data are the raw materials which you may use to build your own argument.

For your folder, submit a two- to three-page alphabetized, annotated bibliography. The annotation should indicate the general nature of the material contained in the work and an indication of the author's perspective. If possible, two works should be primary sources. (10 points, due March 14.)

Step Five: Notes on Reading and Research

Using 3 x 5 cards, keep a careful record of your sources and of the information you gather during your research process. The cards need not be typed, but they should conform to the following model: [inserts boxes illustrating cards].

For your folder, submit one bibliography card and one note card (either a summary or a quote). (5 points, due March 14 with annotated bibliography.)

Step Six: Outline

Having completed all the previous steps, you are now ready to prepare a detailed outline of your essay. The outline should begin with a thesis statement (the now-answered question).

For your folder, submit a two- or three-page outline. Organize your note cards according to the section of your outline, and with a red pen write the appropriate outline number on the cards you will use in writing a paper. (10 points, due April 17.)

Step Seven: Rough Draft

A successful paper must always go through several drafts that are revised and improved. Because the first draft is not a polished piece of work, it is not important to correct spelling or grammatical errors. It is important, however, to use the draft to get comments from other readers. It is also important that the rough draft uses complete and standard footnoting for documenting quotations and ideas.

For your folder, submit a complete rough draft (computer printout) of your paper. To the draft, attach the signed comments of at least two other people who have read your paper. (15 points, due April 23.)

Step Eight: Final Draft

The final draft of any paper is a carefully crafted piece of writing, free of spelling and grammatical errors. The point of the paper should be very clear to the reader, and you should never expect the reader to search between the lines to untangle the message you intend the paper to convey.

Figure 7.2 continued

For your folder, submit a final revision of the draft prepared for step seven. I will make no corrections on the paper, but I will not assign a grade to any paper with five or more spelling errors, five or more major grammatical errors, or a combination of seven or more spelling and grammatical errors. Papers containing the above number of errors will be returned, and you must correct the problems before you can receive any credit. For my definition of a major error, refer to numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 in "Guidelines for Writing Papers." [Guidelines not included here.] (20 points, due May 7.)

Students complain, but I don't get bad papers anymore.

evaluations a bit. But I've noticed that I don't get bad papers anymore. Also, students do a lot more reading for their papers. They do a lot more reflective thinking. And even though I don't conference as intentionally, students still come in and talk to me about their papers, or they'll talk to me after class.

An international student: "This is very different."

I had an international student, a really ambitious student, who, after the second week of class, said, "Well, I'm on my final draft." Then I said, "Let's look at the steps for doing research that I've outlined in the syllabus." And he wasn't real happy about that at first. But then, a week later, he came and said, "I really want to learn how to write a paper. I realize this is very different than anything I've done." He's from Kenya, and he wanted to do his paper in African history, which is an area where I can work with him very closely.

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I have not used in-class writes.

Reasons: feasibility, logistics, community: getting the writing back.

Interviewer: Have you used in-class writes?

Faculty: That I don't do. Two reasons. One is—and maybe I don't do it right—in-class writes can be very time-consuming if I have to read them and grade them or anything like that. Ideally, I would like to give pop quizzes every week, just to keep students up to speed. But I virtually have given up on that just because the ungraded papers pile up on my desk. And getting work back quickly is so important. The other thing, most of my courses are pretty content oriented. And so it might be a bit harder, though not impossible, to devise an in-class writing.

For me, it's basically a question of time. I'm probably like other people: I heard lots of ideas at the workshop, and the ideas I heard that seemed most important to me were

related to doing the research project. And maybe if I went back and looked at my workshop material, some other ideas would be there, and I'd say, "Oh, those would really be helpful and good." And they probably just sort of faded from my memory.

Interviewer: How about journals with travel? Have you done those?

Faculty: Yes, and that is very helpful. We took a group to South Africa, and students wrote a journal. Earlier, when I was in Liberia, I had followed the model much more closely. I had a list of topics to guide students in producing a journal. Unfortunately, that got me in trouble politically. My list of topics got clear to the president's mansion [laughs].

Interviewer: Because?

Faculty: The year before, there had been an American girl at the same school. She had kept a journal like other American kids do. Some of her African roommates got hold of her journal and read it. It said some things that weren't terribly complimentary to the president of the country. Privacy is not nearly as important as dignity in Africa. As a result, in a few days the contents of that journal were known in the executive mansion in Monrovia, a hundred and twenty kilometers away. When I got to the university, they said, "Are you going to have your students write journals?" Being honest, I said, "Yes." When they wondered what we were going to write about, I gave them my list of topics. And the next day the president of the university and all of his cabinet called me into the president's office to explain my project. They also listed the topics they didn't want the students to write about. In addition, they wanted permission to read the journals afterward. [Laughs] I mean, they were scared. And the president said, "Look, you know, we get money from the state, and if we embarrass the president or cause trouble, this could jeopardize our funding; it could jeopardize the status of the university." And so we sort of worked out a compromise. I knocked out some of the topics that, to them, would have seemed embarrassing.

Certainly the writing workshop was pivotal.

Interviewer: And why would that be?

Faculty: To me, teaching writing is just critically important. One of the things I've said over and over is that we

I heard lots of ideas at the workshop and chose the most important to me.

Journals have been very helpful with students on field trips.

In Liberia, the journal got me in trouble.

The workshop was pivotal.

We err on the side of good teaching rather than good learning.

I'm going to err on the side of helping students learn, although it's easy to slip back.

have to be far more concerned that students learn than that we're good teachers. And I think, at Whitworth, at times, we err on the side of good teaching rather than good learning. We emphasize delivery and how things are presented, and that doesn't necessarily translate into the students' really understanding and learning the material, grappling with the material. That can be hard and frustrating at times, although I think in the end it pays off tremendously. Presenting a well-designed, tight lecture is fun, and it's beautiful, but it may not always be compatible with student learning. And I'm going to always, I hope, err on the side of helping students learn, although it's easy to slip back into the presenting mode.

A Divergent Voice

"Has It Influenced My Teaching? Well, I Can't Put My Finger on Anything Specific"

—History, TSU

[Note: This Towson State professor, during a ten-year period, has taught writing-intensive courses and attended several WAC workshops of various types and lengths. He has served on a WAC committee and has been a regular member of the Faculty Writers' Response Group, where faculty respond to one another's writing. Dowling observed his class, talked to his students, and worked with him. The interview was conducted in 1994. The interviewer was Dowling.

The faculty member claims not to have been influenced by WAC. But listen carefully to this voice. Note the strong connection between the Faculty Writers' Response Group, which gave him the valuable and thorough criticism he'd not gotten elsewhere, and his teaching philosophy—lots of criticism is good for students. Criticism, expressed as red marks on the exams, seems, for him, to be the basis for community, an act of caring, not hostility. Those who criticized him for the red marks, he thinks, have themselves neglected the thing that students and writers need most—thorough, rigorous criticism. And to slavishly copy the critiquer's corrections, as he says his students do, rather than productively using the critique, is a betrayal of community. It renders draft response for him a frustrating and ineffective method for helping students. Further, in his view, the role of content knowledge in thinking is extremely important. That belief shapes much of his approach to teaching and writing. This faculty member is not resisting WAC, in his own mind. The converts have his blessing. He assigns and critiques lots of writing in his classes. He's

given hours and hours of his time in the service of WAC—but he maintains the right to be “old-fashioned,” to guide his teaching by his own philosophy, and to take or ignore WAC strategies, given his theoretical base, his time constraints, and his own experiences as a writer.]

Faculty: Back in the early days of the writing group [TSU faculty who met to respond to one another’s writing], much of what we did was creative writing.

The faculty writing group.

Interviewer: You were doing poems in those days. One or two eventually got published.

Faculty: Yes, and I eventually got two articles published. I remember I gave the group a sketch for a novel, with a few scenes in detail. We kicked that around, and I couldn’t get across to the group that this was not a final product. I just wanted to find out whether this was psychologically a sound plot. But much of what they did was helpful. My previous novel was much improved by the group’s comments. My agent had worked with me, but the writing group is the first time I’d gotten really sustained comment. It never bothered me to get criticism.

It never bothered me to get criticism.

Interviewer: Did the writing group carry over to your classroom?

Faculty: Has it influenced my way of teaching? Well, I can’t put my finger on anything specific. Some aspects of style.

Interviewer: I remember, in 1984, you presented an exam paper to a writing workshop.

Faculty: Yes, I had red ink all over the student’s paper. I have this compulsion to correct students when they’re wrong, and I think that helps them. If we put it off, that doesn’t help. That’s why they come to college not knowing—because other teachers have put it off. In the workshop, I really got jumped on. But those were a bunch of education people who don’t really believe in criticizing students very rigorously.

I think correcting students helps them.

Draft response is good in theory, but I have such a paper load, I can’t do it. Also, I end up just grading myself, because the students just copy the corrections I’ve made. They don’t think it through on their own.

Draft response is good in theory, but I can’t do it. Students just copy the corrections I’ve made.

I do give my 290 class the option of rewriting their prospectus. I presented that at a workshop one time—how I get my history students to write a prospectus for their term papers.

I don't do journals either, because of time.

I don't do journals, either, because of lack of time. Those might work well in English or health sciences. In history, I'm not sure it's very relevant. I'm very old-fashioned. In my department, our feeling is that students can't think if they don't have anything to think about. At first we have to teach them stuff, and then later they can mull it over.

Some of the people I've met in WAC seem almost to have had a religious conversion. That was great. But I wonder if we're fighting a losing battle, with computers, and psychologists telling us we can do as well with objective tests.

WAC is writing in essay form.

Interviewer: How would you define WAC?

Faculty: WAC is writing in an essay-like form.

Interviewer: Do you talk about teaching with colleagues in your department?

Faculty: A typical conversation in my department goes like this: we in history grade essays and book reports; we do nothing else from September until May. And these other featherbedders only have objective exams, so of course they can publish more [laughs].

Each of these very different faculty stories shows WAC as part of a complex mosaic that includes faculty members' own experiences as writers, their deeply held beliefs about teaching, their departmental contexts, their teaching loads, their personal styles, and their approaches to risk and change. While faculty were not always sure whether a strategy was "WAC," they focused on what "works." They asked whether a strategy would help to achieve community, whether it would enhance student learning, whether it was feasible, and whether it fit their own philosophies, priorities, and styles of teaching. But most of all, what emerged for us from all these faculty stories was the sense of faculty as active constructors of their own meanings, as changers and searchers, each struggling to find a self, to help learners, to develop community.